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RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7507  
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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND  
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND  
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON  
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC  
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: Syria/ Tajikistan, Syria/Oman, Syria/Germany, Syria/Iraq,  
Palestinian Agreement, Putin, Lebanon (2/9-11)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers on Feb. 11 reported the visit to Damascus by Tajik President Imamoli Rakhmanov on Feb. 9, and his talks with President Asad, VP Shara and FM Mouallem. The Presidents called for scheduling a withdrawal of foreign troops from Iraq, reiterated the importance of a Palestinian national unity government, and called on all nations to make efforts to resume the Middle East peace talks to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the region. A final statement issued by the presidency said that Asad and Rakhmanov underscored their keenness to increase cooperation between the two countries in all fields, and the need to work to bring about peace and stability in the Middle East. The two also voiced support for the political process in Iraq and the preservation of its territorial unity. On Feb. 10, the two sides signed a number of agreements in the economic, scientific, technical, tourism and investment fields, Syria's official news agency SANA said.

The visit of Omani FM Ben Alawi to Syria was the second topic in the Syrian Press. President Asad and FM Ben Alawi met on Feb. 10. They discussed the current regional situation and bilateral cooperation, expressed satisfaction over the Palestinian agreement to form a national unity government, and reiterated the importance of continuing Arab efforts to lift the siege on Palestinians.

As for Syrian-Iraqi relations, papers reported VP Shara's meeting on Feb. 8 with Antonio Guterras, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, which focused on the status of Iraqi refugees in Syria. Shara held the US responsible for the "humanitarian catastrophe" caused by its invasion of Iraq, which has led to an outflow of refugees, a SANA statement said. "The invasion of Iraq has led to the outpouring of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees to Syria and the rest of the neighboring countries," Shara said. The influx of refugees "has imposed heavy security, social and economic burdens; the US bears the basic responsibility of this humanitarian catastrophe," Shara said. For his part, Guterras voiced profound appreciation for Syria's hosting a large portion of the refugees, hailing its efforts to alleviate their sufferings.

End of summary.

¶2. Selected Headlines:

"Syria and Tajikistan sign nine protocols of cooperation. The two countries confirm support for the Palestinian people and condemn Israeli aggression, call for establishment of a multi-polar world, denunciation of all forms of terrorism, achievement of comprehensive peace in the region in accordance with international resolutions, maintenance of Iraq's territorial unity and setting of a timetable for withdrawal of foreign troops" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 2/11)

"President Asad and Rakhmanov of Tajikistan review bilateral relations and investments between Syria and Tajikistan. Presidents Asad and Rakhmanov discuss the peace process and terrorism, as well as reactivation of the Organization of Islamic Conference" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/9)

"President Asad and Omani Minister of Foreign Affairs Yousuf Ben Alawi stress the necessity for exerting efforts to lift the siege imposed on Palestinians. Ben Alawi: Syria's position is a true Arab one" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 2/11)

"Foreign Minister al-Mouallem reviews prospects of mutual cooperation and regional developments with Omani Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Bin Alawi" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/10)

"Vice President Shara to UN High Commissioner for Refugees Guterras: America is responsible for the catastrophe of Iraqi refugees" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 2/9)

"Deputy PM for Economic Affairs Dardari: A new approach for Syrian-German understanding. Falter: [Head of the Middle East Department at the German Economic Cooperation Ministry]: Syria has a pivotal role in achieving peace" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 2/11)

"Deputy PM for Economic Affairs al-Dardari continues talks in Germany. German Foreign Minister Steinmeier: We call for dialogue with Syria" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/10)

"The UN Agency for Refugees is concerned about handling the conditions of Iraqis. UN High Commissioner for Refugees Guterras: Syria has shown a great deal of hospitality to Iraqi refugees" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/10)

"As Hamas and Fatah agree on a national unity government, Hanieh is designated to preside over the new government" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/9)

"Arab and international welcome of the Palestinian unity deal. US reservation, and Israel retaliates on Palestinians praying at the al-Aqsa Mosque" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/10)

"The Arab League calls for a UN Security Council session to debate Israeli aggression against the al-Aqsa Mosque" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/11)

"New Chief of US Forces in Iraq warns against failure of the Baghdad security plan. Three US soldiers killed in Iraq" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 2/11)

"Russian news agency Interfax: US Secretary of Defense is more hawkish than Rumsfeld. Gates: Get ready for a war with Russia and China" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/9)

"President Putin: US policies dissipate peace and stability in the world" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/11)

"Lahoud rejects any measures on the border without the army's approval. Lahoud: Israeli endeavors to exploit UNIFIL to swallow Lebanese territory" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 2/11)

### 13. Editorial Block Quotes:

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"Territory within Range of US Fire"  
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Isam Dari, Chief Editor of government-owned Tishrin wrote (2/10):  
"US Defense Secretary Robert Gates stated that Russia is not far from the range of US fire.... Based on these threats, we fully understand President Putin's fears at the US military buildup in the Gulf and his call for setting a timetable to withdraw foreign forces from Iraq....

"Russia has every right to express its legitimate fear of the neoconservatives' sick dreams, mythical visions, and belief in the creation of the American empire on the whole earth.... NATO expansion in the east and west poses a real threat not only to Russia, but also to the former Soviet republics and China. It threatens world peace and security in one way or another.

"All nations on earth have the right to be worried about the future of this planet, which is now within the range of US fire....

"In the Middle East people cannot trust this monstrous enemy, which not only besieges us, fights to deprive us of our daily bread, and loots our resources and wealth, but also occupies our countries and engages in destruction, theft, and spreading of sedition, and attempts to divide countries, incite people against one another, and spread chaos and corruption....

"Can anyone, after all that has happened in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, and Lebanon, convince us and broad Arab masses that an administration skilled at killing Arabs and Muslims and disdaining their existence, culture, and beliefs can be an ally, a friend, or even a mediator?

"Advocates and wagers of war cannot make peace anywhere in the world; they only bring disasters and tribulations upon the

world....

"We are not saying that Arabs must declare war on the United States, but they must be alert to the danger. They must raise their voices in protest against it, even if only once, when it kills us in Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon, and Somalia with its weapons and army and through its forward tool, Israel. This is not an impossible demand if intentions are sincere and hearts are clear and if we abandon some of our fear and cowardice, stop putting all our eggs in the American basket, and say 'no', if only one time, to the orders that come from overseas."

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"Why, Why?"

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Izz-al-Din al-Darwish, an editorialist in government-owned Tishrin, wrote (2/9): "In light of the miserable Arab situation, it is not strange for Israel to encroach upon Al-Aqsa Mosque and publicly provoke Arabs to this extent?"

"Israel is a racist, occupational entity that does not hesitate to do anything to serve its objectives. This entity understands only the language of force. This, simply, is the definition of Israel. Why, then, should we be surprised at what Israel is doing if Arabs insist on remaining inactive, watching from afar?"

"What is more astonishing is that some Arabs stockpile more modern weapons than Israel does, and they have enough influence to shift all balances if they want to. But they prefer to continue to lead a life of opulence, not caring about the rights of the homeland and the diktats of the Islamic faith, which include defending the holy places, and in our current case defending the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

"Israel has managed to divide Arabs.... It is now working to hit Arabism in the heart, in favor of the new Middle East, perpetuate its occupation of Arab territories, and turn Arabs into guards for its borders, apologists for its occupation and Judaization plans, and false witnesses to its genocidal operations against humans and its looting of Arab wealth."

"Why this suspicious Arab silence about what the Israeli bulldozers

are doing in broad daylight near the walls of Al-Haram al-Sharif?  
Why this unembarrassed Arab rush toward Israel and what it  
wants...?"

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"Who Is Behind Political Division within the Quartet?"  
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Dr. Sa'id Musallam, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (2/9): "There were political differences between US and Russian positions toward a Middle East settlement, as appeared in the recent meeting of the international quartet in Washington. Russian diplomacy wants UN resolutions and the Arab peace plan to serve as the basis of any settlement...."

"Based on this, Syria's participation in any event, arrangement, or settlement is essential, and no effective solutions or understandings can be reached without Syria's participation...."

"The United States, however, rejects this Russian position and works to isolate Syria and exclude it from political settlements. The Russian position stresses the importance of the Syrian role, based on Damascus' ability and sincere intentions and the positive signals that Syria's visitors see, especially its effective role in the recent meeting between the Palestinian brothers and the clear assistance it offered them during PA Chairman Mahmud Abbas' recent visit to Syria, as well as the positive role it played to facilitate the meeting between Mish'al and Abbas in Saudi Arabia...."

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"Department of Invasion, Occupation and Terrorism"  
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Charles Kamilah, a commentator in government-owned Tishrin, wrote (2/9): "The huge and unprecedented budget of the US Defense Department means that this actually is a department of occupation roaming the world to besiege and occupy it...."

"The United States is not the target of any attack on its territory.... Why this huge budget? Doesn't the American citizen, the primary taxpayer, have the right to ask about the secret behind the allocation of this incredible amount of money, which would be sufficient to end the poverty, disease, disasters, and ordeals suffered by the entire population of the earth and many fold more?"

"This huge war budget can be seen within the context of US threats to Iran and the decision to establish a US military command for Africa...."

Corbin